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ST. GERARD MAJELLA

The Patron of Mothers



by
REV. JOHN CARR,
C.S.S.R.

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THE STORY OF A GREAT RESOLVE

IN the spring of 1749, some Fathers of the newly-founded Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer had just preached a mission at Muro, a little town some fifty miles to the south of Naples, and were already on their way to evangelize a place called Rionero. Someone running after them and a voice crying tearfully, "Do wait for me, my Fathers, do wait for me," brought them to a halt. Their breathless pursuer soon came up with them. He was a youth of twenty-three—a pale and frail youth—named Gerard Majella. He was not quite a stranger to the Fathers, as, during the mission they had just completed, he had literally plagued them to receive him into their Congregation as a lay brother. However, their saintly Superior, Father Cafaro, could not see his way to burdening a community with one so obviously unsuited for the life he would be called upon to lead. Meanwhile, a loving mother and loving sisters had entered the lists against him, and, knowing with whom they had to do, had locked him in his room until, as they had thought, the danger was past. It was certainly a drastic move, but it was quickly checkmated by another. Gerard cut up his bed-clothes and let himself down from the window, leaving a note on his table to the effect that he had gone away to become a saint. So here were the Fathers and the would-be lay-brother at grips again. Entreaties and refusals began afresh. At last the young man exclaimed despairingly: "Can't you try me? that is all I ask. You may then send me away if you like." There could be no harm in trying him, at any rate, and Father Cafaro gave in. He sent the postulant to Illiceto

with a note containing the words: "I send you a useless lay-brother." The "useless lay-brother" lived for six years in the Congregation, and then died in it.

More than a century and a half went by. It was December 11, 1904. Rome, the first of Christian cities, was unusually astir. To St. Peter's, the first of Christian temples, people of every class and clime were hurrying. The great Basilica was hung with all its splendours. Its storied walls re-echoed to the hum of a countless multitude; and then a moment came when a silence fell and thousands held their breath, and one voice spoke, and from the infallible lips of Pius X. slowly and solemnly came the words:

"For the honour of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the glory of the Catholic Faith and the increase of the Christian religion, on the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and on Our own . . . We decree that the Blessed Confessor, Gerard Majella, is a Saint, and that he be enrolled in the Catalogue of the Saints."

And then, as 60,000 voices vented their joy and thanksgiving in a great Te Deum, a wave of sound gathered round the Vicar of Christ, rolled through the mighty building and broke through its portals into the world outside, while every bell in Rome rang out to Christendom the words: "*Saint Gerard, pray for us.*" The note left on his table by the young man from Muro was not written in vain: he had run away to become a saint, and he became one.

LITTLE GERARD AND LITTLE JESUS

In Muro, perched prettily on a slope of the Apennines, was Gerard born, on April 6, 1726. The child, who was to ennoble and enrich a pious father and mother beyond all their dreams, was God's most splendid gift to Dominico and Benedetta Majella. Two girls—Brigida and Anna—had preceded their little brother. Dominico was a tailor

by trade, and tailoring was to hold an honoured place in the occupations of our saint.

Precociousness is no rare thing in the annals of sanctity, and is not to be wondered at. In the lives of the world's outstanding men we look for an early budding of their genius, for some childish intimations of their specific bent; and we usually find them. Thus, for instance, we read of a Mozart scribbling harmonies with his baby fingers, of a Napoleon finding his child's delight in marshalling tin soldiers. Even so was it with the vast majority of the saints, whom we may call, in a sense, geniuses in holiness; and in this Gerard was true to type: the saint soon appeared. And so we find him, who lived his brief life more in heaven than on earth, turning Godwards almost in his babyhood—making religion his only interest, the imitation of her ceremonies his hobby and little altars his only toy.

In his case, the holy boy was, indeed, the father of the holy man. The virtues and gifts that go to the making of the Saint Gerard whom the Catholic world knows and loves and that prove the truth of the Psalmist's words, "There was not found the like to him in glory," were not slow to show themselves. Thus we are told that this child hungered more for intercourse with God in prayer than for bodily food, and that even now, for the love of Jesus Whose glorious imitator he was to be, he would fast in a way that awoke a mother's fears. But we read, too, that the future saint of obedience, whose master passion was the doing of the Will of God, had already learnt to recognize this Will in the will of those set over him, and, at his mother's bidding, ceased his youthful austerities with the same alacrity with which he began them.

Jesus and Mary had, indeed, already taken possession of this young heart in a wonderful way and were not long in giving wonderful proofs of it. In the hamlet of Capetignano, about a mile from the town, was a chapel in which an image of the Divine Mother and her Child was vene-

rated. One day, the little boy, scarcely more than five, toddled out there alone. He knelt to pray. The Child of Bethlehem evidently saw something in that young heart yet lovelier than the mere sinlessness of childhood, for Gerard saw Him leave His Mother's arms and stand beside him; and then Mary's Son and Benedetta's played together. When that wondrous play was ended, Gerard received from Jesus a tiny loaf of surpassing whiteness. He brought it home, and, when questioned by his astonished mother, he replied: "The Child of a beautiful lady, with Whom I have been playing, gave it to me." Morning after morning was the prodigy renewed. One day Brigida followed her little brother and witnessed it herself. Twenty years later, on the occasion of a visit she paid Gerard in his Redemptorist home, he remarked with his wonted simplicity: "Now I know that it was the Infant Jesus Who used to give me those lovely little white loaves." "Well," said his sister, "let us go to Him again." "No," replied Gerard, "I can find Him everywhere now." Little Jesus seemed, indeed, to go out of His way to meet little Gerard, for it was at this period, too, that the favoured boy was often given to feast his ravished eyes on the Divine Child on the altar after the Consecration.

Those tiny snowy loaves were surely symbolical, and it was to be expected that this angelic soul would hunger for the Bread of Angels as soon as it should hear of it; and so, in truth, it was. Gerard was not yet seven when his hunger proved too much for him. One day he followed the people to the altar rails. The priest, seeing his age, passed him by, and the child withdrew in tears. But Jesus hungered even more for Gerard, and Jesus was omnipotent. That same night St. Michael, the Prince of the Angel Host, bore him the Body of his Lord. Yet again did these two children meet. A priest found Gerard one day kneeling near the altar, and on enquiring what he was doing there, got the answer: "A little Child came out of

the tabernacle and gave me Holy Communion." Wonderful happenings these, and yet, after what happened on Christmas night, who is going to set limits to what the love of God may do when it meets with a Gerard?

TAILORING AND SANCTITY: A DOUBLE APPRENTICESHIP

Gerard was sent to school at an early age. Such was his docility and application that his teacher called him "his delight." However, his father's death brought his schooling rather abruptly to an end, for he had to earn and come to his mother's help. His attainments were thus very slight—a fact to be borne in mind in the light of his after-career. Tailoring was evidently in the family, and he was apprenticed to a tailor called Pannuto.

But he had other lessons to learn in his master's house besides plying the needle: he had to face the rude apprenticeship of the cross. It was not without a reason; for favours most wonderful were awaiting him, and virtues most wonderful had to precede. Now the Lord, in the fashioning of His heroes, uses instruments of all shapes and sizes and they are generally lying near the material to be worked. The instrument He now employed in the fashioning of a Saint Gerard was not a particularly delicate one. It might, in fact, be best described as a bludgeon. Though the young apprentice was, as might be expected, a conscientious and thorough worker, yet, while his hands were busy, his heart was in heaven and, even at this early period, he would at times fall into ecstasy. Occasionally, and, of course, unwittingly, his work suffered. Moreover, the better to pray unseen, he would often hide beneath his work-table. Now his master, a good man himself, asked for nothing better than to have a budding saint in his service, and did not dream of coming between the holy boy and God. But his foreman, an ill-tempered fellow,

took a different view of things. In his eyes Gerard was a shirker. Not content with telling him so and rating him roundly, he soon went from words to deeds. One day he dragged the little boy from under the table and belaboured him most cruelly. At times the ruffian would strike him with his clenched fist, and trample on him. Ah! it was no question of ecstasies now: it was the stark teaching of the Gospel that confronted Gerard. But he rose to the occasion. He whose devotion to the Will of God is hardly matched in the annals of the saints would say: "My God, my God, Thy holy Will be done."

On leaving Pannuto's establishment, Gerard changed his occupation, and, more intent on gaining merit than on earning money, took service with a certain gentleman whose temper was notoriously bad. He was a curious amalgam of sweetness towards God and sourness towards his neighbour, and considered Gerard's growing reputation for holiness to be his best testimonial, seemingly unconscious of the fact that his own ill-humour would enter largely into the making of a saint of anyone who had virtue enough to stay on with him; and nobody did stay long. Gerard was sixteen years when he entered his household, and he stayed three years. They were three years of thankless and unremitting drudgery. Gerard fell an easy and a willing prey. Not exactly blows this time, but words—angry, scolding, nagging words—and there was no end to them. The neighbours wondered how the boy stood it all. Such endurance, however, was fast becoming child's play for Gerard, and a servant boy who spent all his spare time in prayer, who wore a hair shirt and fed on dry bread and vegetables in order to give to the sick and poor, was not likely to show the white feather in such encounters.

Here, too, striking virtue was followed by a striking miracle. One day his master went out for a walk. Gerard, too, went out to fetch water in the square, locking the door after him. When at the well, he unfortunately let

the key fall in. As he knew what to expect on his return, his consternation was great. But it was shortlived. Off he ran to the Cathedral and soon returned with a little statue of the Divine Infant in his hands. This he fastened to a rope and let down into the well, saying, with delightful simplicity: "O my little Child, my little Child, do help me to get that key." A crowd had gathered and all eyes were on the rope which Gerard was now drawing to the surface. The Infant Jesus did not fail His former playmate, and the statue reappeared bearing in its hand the precious key. The news of this prodigy spread far and wide, and *Pozzo Gerardiello*, or Gerard's Well, is still pointed out to the stranger.

On his master's death, Gerard resumed his tailoring, this time in the house of a tailor named Vitus Mennona. Here he found a master who appreciated his virtues to the full, and who, in after years, visited Gerard when the latter was a lay-brother, and would grow enthusiastic about his holiness.

Gerard was now in a position to set up for himself and returned to his mother's home a fully qualified tailor. He was now nineteen. He did a good business, for he gave good value. He was conscientiousness itself, and, according to one witness, would not keep as much as a piece of thread that did not belong to him. So true was this that when some material a poor man had sent in for a garment was far too small, and when it had miraculously increased in the holy tailor's hands, the miraculous surplus was returned. His prices were low, and he often worked gratuitously for the poor. This programme, we venture to think, would go well in any language, and suit 1958 as well as 1745, and need not necessarily be restricted to tailors. His earnings he divided into three equal portions—one going to the upkeep of the house, another to the poor, and the third to Masses for the souls in Purgatory. At times Benedetta would look on rather nervously at such generosity,

but Gerard would say with that quiet assurance that works miracles: "Never fear, mother; God will provide."

THE RUNAWAY FOR CHRIST

Though the religious state is by no means necessary for sanctification, and though men and women in every walk of life are to be found among the Church's canonized children, yet it will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that the thoughts of him who was athirst for sacrifice and who was one day to vow heroically to do the most perfect thing, quickly turned to the keeping of the Counsels. On completing his apprenticeship with Vitus Mennona, therefore, the boy had presented himself at a convent of Capuchins in the neighbourhood. Now he had an uncle in this Community—a theologian of note, named Father Bonaventure—on whose support, no doubt, he counted. His youth, however—he was but sixteen at the time—and his very indifferent health decided against him. Partly to console his nephew in his disappointment, Father Bonaventure presented Gerard with a new coat, which, it appears, he sorely needed. The boy had scarcely left the precincts of the convent when a ragged beggar, appealing piteously, accosted him. In a trice, the new coat and Gerard had parted company, and the beggar, no doubt to his own amazement, was arrayed in it. Now this treatment of his gift did not in the least commend itself to Uncle, who at once called the offending nephew back and told him so. "My dear Uncle," replied Gerard, "please don't be angry with me. Really, the poor fellow needed the coat far more than I did. If you had only seen him, you would have done the same thing yourself." The son of St. Francis could say nothing to this.

So Gerard had to bide his time and knock at another door. Had God not destined him to be a son of St. Alphonsus, we cannot help thinking that, with his simplicity

and detachment and personal love for Our Lord, he would have made a worthy follower of the Seraph of Assisi. However, another religious family, whose sons set themselves expressly to imitate the life and virtues of Jesus Christ, was to receive him into its bosom and to be made illustrious by his virtues.

We have seen the outcome of his last appeal to the Redemptorists. It was not his first. Already, in the August of 1748, a Redemptorist Father, accompanied by a lay-brother, had passed through Muro. Gerard felt drawn towards them and had broached the subject of his vocation with the brother. The latter tried to discourage him by saying: "Our life is too hard and our Rule very severe." "Why, that's just what I want," retorted the intrepid postulant. For some reason or another, there the matter ended for the time being. However, the following year the Redemptorists were back in Muro to preach a mission, and Gerard pressed his suit anew, with the result we have already related.

The house of Illiceto, to which Father Cafaro had sent him, was a good day's hard walking from Muro; but Gerard's longings lent him wings; and on May 17, 1749, its doors opened to receive him. On entering and on hearing that the monastery was dedicated to Our Lady, he wept for joy and kissed its walls. Within these walls he was to spend the greater part of his religious life. That life was to last but a short six years; but they were to be six years of unremitting domestic work, of countless conversions, of astounding miracles, of unspeakable austerities and trials, and of a love for God and his neighbour that made him more like a seraph than a man.

THE "USELESS LAY-BROTHER."

So obvious was Gerard's sanctity that St. Alphonsus, slow to move in such a matter, agreed to shorten the novitiate

of this extraordinary novice and admitted him to profession on July 16, 1752. Gerard Majella was now a professed Redemptorist lay-brother: henceforth, after his own sanctification, domestic work of all kinds was to be his professional duty. No one better understood all that this implied. Even in his tailor's shop, he had a firm grasp of truths that escaped not a few Christians: that all authentic holiness is to be found in the sphere of life allotted to each one by God, and that thoroughness and constancy in the discharge of the duties of one's state is the first—and not rarely **the** most painful—of all austerities; that no duty is a small thing and that sin alone degrades; that the most menial service, if done aright, is a prayer, while the highest prayer to which any duty is sacrificed is an offence; that, in God's sight, the least duty is of equal import with the greatest and is immeasurably more important than the noblest deed that is not a duty; that God needs no man and can raise up children to Abraham from the stones; that it is not the *what* one does in God's service, but the *why* and the *how* that matters; that whatever we do for the glory of God will receive good payment on the great Day of Account. All these things were the ABC for Gerard, and he never lost sight of them. Had Gerard not dug in the garden, mended clothes, cooked the dinner, washed the dishes, answered the bell, swept the corridor, and a hundred similar things well, and done them for God, the Catholic world would have never heard of him. But because he did these things for God's sake and did them so with heroic thoroughness and persistency, the Catholic world venerates and loves him now as St. Gerard Majella. No doubt he did other things, too, that helped in the winning of that title; but, had he done them at the expense of his lowly duties as a lay-brother, the Catholic world, we repeat, would have never heard of him.

His programme as a worker will be of interest. Among his written resolutions we find the following:

"I will obey my Superiors as Thy Divine Person made visible to my sight. . . . As soon as I see a Father or Brother in any need of assistance, I will leave all to help him, if I can do so consistently with obedience. . . . Never will I mix myself up with anyone else's business. I will never say, 'I don't like that. That's not done properly,' or the like. Whenever I am told to help others in their work I will obey the responsible person exactly and without remark. I will never allow myself to say that anything is not done as it should be. Still, when I know from experience how things should be carried out, I will give my advice, but never in the tone of a master. When I am joined with others in discharging the duties of the house, however trivial they may be (sweeping the corridors, moving furniture and the like), I will make it my rule never to be anxious to secure the best place or the best things. Conveniences I will yield to others, taking for myself what God may leave me. Thus everyone will be pleased, myself among the rest. I will never put myself forward to discharge any duty, but will wait until I am told what to do."

The amount of unpleasantness and sin such a code eliminates from any sphere of work is not hard to see.

The "useless lay-brother" was soon found to be capable of turning his hand to anything. "Every kind of office was acceptable to him," writes a biographer who knew him well; "whether he was employed in the kitchen baking bread, or attending to the door, he discharged every duty with holy indifference. 'We can please God and do His holy Will in every office,' he used to say." Another Father testifies that, in his eagerness to help, he almost snatched work from the hands of others. "Let me do something," he would say to a Brother whose work was very hard. "I am younger; go, now, and rest yourself."

As though the Lord meant him to serve as model for every kind of worker, especially in religion, Gerard was, in turn gardener, sacristan, cook, tailor, refectorian, infirmarian, carpenter and porter. He was even clerk of the works during building operations. He began with the garden. It was a violent change from the needle to a spade, and though Gerard plied both one and the other with equal thoroughness and zest, a chance look into the garden made it clear to the Superiors that the new gardener was overdoing it, and Gerard was made sacristan instead. A duty that brought him into such close and constant touch with the Divine Companion of his childhood was indeed a labour of love. "All our old Fathers," relates a witness, "told me that the holy Brother was an accomplished sacristan . . . he kept the church so exquisitely neat and clean that since his time they have never found his equal." Half a century later, people were still speaking of that wonderful sacristan. Naturally his proficiency at the needle, too, was often turned to account. Here he had big opportunities of being good to others at his own expense, and he never lost them.

Perhaps there is no office in a Community that makes more continuous demands on the virtue of him who holds it than that of porter. A porter in a busy convent must either be a holy man himself or afford ample opportunities to others of becoming holy. Needless to say, Gerard was an ideal porter. He thus puts into concrete form his attitude towards his new duties: "These keys must open the gates of heaven for me." Besides being heroically patient, he was an angel of charity; and he had a great field. A biographer writes:

"Our house at this time was besieged with beggars. The holy porter was as anxious for their welfare as a mother is for the welfare of her children. He had the art of sending them all away satisfied, and neither

their unreasonableness nor their tricks ever made him lose his patience."

The sick and such as had seen better days and were ashamed to beg openly were the dearest to his heart. The winter of 1745-55 was a rude one, and famine stalked the land. Two hundred men, women and children clamoured daily for bread at the monastery door. Gerard was given a free hand and he made full use of it; he was now in his element; cupboards and wardrobes were ransacked, and miracles worked under people's eyes supplied all deficiencies.

We have said that he was even clerk of the works. It happened towards the end of his brief career, when he was summoned to a new foundation at Caposele and entrusted with the task. Now Superiors knew that nothing, naturally speaking, could be more repugnant to this lover of solitude and silence, but they also knew their man. Not content with the less strenuous business of overseeing and giving orders, Gerard, utterly oblivious to his bodily needs and, what is still more noteworthy, suppressing his desires for quiet prayer, threw himself with an ardour that never flagged into the actual work, and seemed to be everywhere at once.

God showed that He was with the worker by a miracle, and by a decidedly useful miracle at that. Money ran short and pay-day was coming round. The Superior was in a fix, and told Gerard as much. "Reverend Father," came the calm reply, "write a letter to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament." The letter was duly written. Gerard laid it on the altar, knocked at the tabernacle and said: "Here is our petition, O Lord, it is for Thee to answer it." He then spent the whole of that Friday night praying in the church. When Saturday dawned, he knocked again and at once there was a ring at the convent door. He hurried to the hall and there found two bags of money. The situation was saved.

Gerard's obedience, not merely to instructions, but to the slightest wish of any superior was amazing. In fact, were

the Church ever to look for a patron saint of obedience she need not look beyond St. Gerard. He seemed to revel in obeying and in displaying the power of him who obeys. With obedience on his side, he feared no danger, and, in a sense, felt omnipotent. "See what obedience can do," he said on one occasion, after working a miracle. He wrote: "The will of my Divine Master and the will of my Superior are, to me, one and the same thing." "In a certain way," writes one who knew him well, "he worshipped the thoughts of his Superiors." In fact, Superiors had to be cautious in giving him orders, as Gerard took them at their word and awkward situations would at times ensue. One day, as St. Alphon-sus was dining in the refectory, Gerard suddenly made his appearance, very much in dishabille. His holy Founder not a little shocked at the impropriety, reproved him sternly and demanded an explanation. "I came immediately," was the reply, "because your Reverence called me." The saint had commanded him mentally to come.

Gerard's wonderful obedience was, indeed, rewarded by a wonderful gift: he had an intuitive knowledge, even at a distance, of his Superior's wishes. Nor were Superiors slow to avail themselves of it. We give an instance. His Rector was once speaking about him to the Bishop. His Lordship expressed a desire to meet the wonderful Brother, and offered to send for him. "There is no need of that, my Lord," replied the Rector, "I have but to tell him mentally to come, and he will soon be here." At the very moment Gerard, far away in his convent home, asked leave to make the journey. On appearing at the palace his Superior feigned annoyance and asked him bluntly what was his business. "Your Reverence was pleased to give me a formal obedience to come," was the answer, "as the Bishop wishes to speak with me."

This prompt and unreasoning (though not unreasonable) obedience led at times, we have said, to unforeseen and un-

wished-for results. Some of these, no doubt, would make an uninitiated world sneer; yet one historic act of blind obedience on a battlefield added six hundred names to a nation's catalogue of heroes, and the nation's poet sang of them: "Theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die. . . . Noble six hundred!"

Though Gerard never forgot that all work done for God is for the moment the best of prayers, and though he was, consequently, a thorough worker, yet his thoughts dwelt in heaven, and, do what he would, his hands at times went after them. He went one day to lay the table for dinner for some clerics who were making a retreat in the convent. While so occupied, his eyes fell on a picture of the *Ecce Homo* hanging on the wall of the room. The refectorian straightway went into an ecstasy. Meantime, another Brother came upon the scene and gazed in amazement on Gerard, with his arms extended, his whole body motionless, and holding a fork in one hand and a napkin in the other!—perfect symbolic figure of the active and contemplative life. As the table was not ready and time was pressing, the Brother called Gerard, but to no purpose. He then summoned others to the rescue, but they met with the same success. At last, the Rector was called in and a formal command at once brought the ecstatic refectorian to earth and to the laying of a table.

On another occasion, Gerard had been appointed cook for the day. When dinner-hour was near, the cook was missing and the kitchen locked. At last a search-party, hungry and rather put about, found him as he emerged from the oratory radiant with joy, having just finished his thanksgiving after Holy Communion! We can imagine the torrential expostulation in best Italian style. But Gerard's turn soon came. "Men of little faith," he calmly replied, "and what were the angels doing?" The Community went at once to

the refectory, into which, to the amazement of everybody, an unusually good dinner was brought from the kitchen.

Such was the "useless lay-brother." It was soon admitted on all hands that he "did the work of four."

APOSTLE, DIRECTOR AND THEOLOGIAN.

Gerard was not a priest, and yet he converted innumerable sinners, taught chosen souls the lofty ways of holiness, and talked profound theology with the theologians. How did this come about? On the one hand, he was a humble lay-brother whose sphere of duty lay chiefly in such un-academic surroundings as the kitchen, the refectory and the visitors' hall. On the other hand, from his childhood he was aflame with zeal for his Master and his Master's interests.

Besides this, God had literally showered stupendous gifts upon him, and had almost lent him His omnipotence. Surely such a treasure was not destined to lie hidden in a napkin, surely such a man was destined to walk among men and go about doing good. The sweet ordering of Providence brought it all to pass.

It was the custom with the Neapolitan Fathers to take a lay-brother with them on their missionary journeys who would attend to domestic work in the house in which they lodged. Again, times were bad, and the Fathers were in sore need themselves, and a Brother was wanted to undertake the quite exceptional business of "questing" in their behalf. Then as soon as it got about what manner of man Gerard was, applications for a visit from him flowed in from dignitaries whom it would never do to refuse. All these circumstances launched the lowly Brother on his new and strange career; and so, for three years, he came and went among the people, in town and hamlet, gathering souls.

The saint and the wonder-worker took every place by storm. It was said that his arrival in a parish was worth a mission. "'Tis amazing," his director, the Venerable Father

Cafaro, used to remark, "how that Brother stirs the whole countryside wherever he goes." St. Alphonsus' biographer, Father Tannoia, who lived with Gerard, writes: "At all the missions in which Gerard helped in the service of the Fathers, he wrought numberless conversions. He kept the missionaries busy absolving the sinners he had disposed for the Sacraments. He would sometimes say: 'I am sending you a big fish'." We wonder if any "big fish" will ever read these lines; if so, we pray that Gerard may send him into the net. The same Father Tannoia spoke of him as "a hunter of souls who kept his eye ever fixed on some prey for Jesus Christ." His peculiarly winning ways bore down all opposition. A word, a glance brought the most hardened sinner to his knees. Whenever confessors failed to dispose a sinner, they sent the penitent to Gerard, who sent him back contrite and resolved. Finery and rags, culture and rusticity, daintiness and squalor, jostled with each other in his audience—seeking advice, prayers, consolation—and to send all away happy was Gerard's happiness. He had scarcely a moment he could call his own, and was often busy with his holy work far into the night. A priest who was a witness of his activities in one place writes of him: "He was borne about in triumph like a saint just come from heaven. His words penetrated like darts, and sometimes one could hear nothing but sighs of contrition. The whole city was thrown into a salutary ferment by his coming."

Though gentleness was his most mighty weapon and the one with which he was most at home, yet he could at need speak with a holy wrath that terrified. On certain sins—scandal, for instance, and trickery of all kinds—he had no mercy. An impostor was turning many a dishonest penny by sporting a pair of crutches and a bandaged leg. Gerard knew of it and had warned the fellow repeatedly. Meeting him one day in the street, the saint reproached him anew, and this time tore the bandages from his leg, and lo! the crutches dropped

and their owner ran as fast as two sound legs could carry him. Nor were miracles lacking to support invective. One day, Gerard called at a forge to have his horse shod. The operation was duly performed, but an exorbitant price was demanded. Angered at the obvious injustice, the saint commanded the horse to cast off the new shoes—which it immediately did. Its rider then mounted and rode off, leaving the blacksmith speechless and agape. It is well there are not too many wonder-working saints about to audit accounts and analyse bills: it could be awkward. The saints were simple, but not simpletons; and charity never winks at injustice.

There is a sinner who, in a way, is the saddest sinner of all. By his own deliberate act, he turns a remedy into poison, challenges the proffered hand of reconciliation with his God to strike with a deadly blow, and forges new fetters for himself by the very means that other sinners take to strike off the old. Fearing what can be at most but a whispered rebuke for his soul's saving, or else ashamed with a shame of the devil's making—a shame which the admission of sin now fills him with, while its commission failed to inspire it—this sinner wilfully withholds from God's minister a secret that, sooner or later, must be told at his eternal peril, and thus drags after him an ever-lengthening chain and goes about with hell in his heart, and, all the weary while, a little word to the confessor—a brief human appeal for sympathy and help, a breaking of the ice, the slightest opening of the door of the burdened heart—and all would be well.

Sacrilegious confessions stirred Gerard in a special way, and one of his greatest gifts was exercised to rescue such as were guilty of them. Two or three instances are as much as our space allows. A certain notary had murdered a man and had buried the body under a cherry tree in his vineyard. A fruitless search had been made. Years went by,

and the incident had been gradually forgotten. Meantime, the murderer concealed his crime in confession. The first time Gerard met him alone, he said: "My friend, your conscience is in a bad way. Your confessions are worthless, as you have not yet told the murder you committed near the cherry-tree in your vineyard, where you buried the murdered man." The criminal hurried terror-stricken to confession, this time to make a good one.

Gerard was once in a shop where pious objects were sold. An ecclesiastic entered and the shopkeeper began to talk piety to both of them. Seizing the first chance, the saint took the man aside and told him of a great sin long lying on his conscience.

Gerard happened to be in a church one day and saw a girl leaving after having been to confession. The saint called her aside. "What brought you here?" he asked. "To go to confession," she replied. "Of course," returned Gerard, "but you did not make a good one." He then told her of a sin she had concealed through shame.

This special and much-needed apostolate among sacrilegious souls St. Gerard seems to have made peculiarly his own, and he has long been regarded as the patron of a good confession. It may be that, in the cases just given, some reader may read his own story. If so, let him not forget St. Gerard, and we promise that St. Gerard will not forget him.

But this extraordinary lay-brother was used by God, not merely to snatch sinners from the mire, but also to search for chosen souls to present the Divine Spouse and to have a hand in their sanctification. His doing so was, of course, an obvious call from God, a call recognized by Superiors—St. Alphonsus among the number—ratified by Bishops, and justified by results; and the results were rich. Not only did he make it his business to encourage and facilitate vocations—often by miracles—but by word of mouth and by

letter he directed individuals as well as entire communities in the higher paths. Many of these letters are extant, and though their form betrays his very indifferent schooling, their matter is worthy of a master of the spiritual life. Of his conferences a Bishop, who had been applied to for a visit from Gerard by a religious community, wrote: "A chat with this Brother will do more for you than a whole course of Lenten sermons."

We have called Gerard a theologian, and not without reason. A priest said of him: "He treated religious subjects, and especially the mystery of the Redemption, with the ease of an Augustine or a Jerome." "To discuss spirituality and theology with Gerard," said a Bishop, "is to become his disciple, and he who becomes his disciple will come away from him a true theologian." The President of a seminary asked him, one day, to expound the opening chapter of St. John's Gospel before the college staff and students. He did so with a loftiness and precision that astounded his hearers. Prelates consulted him on matters of the highest import, and the ablest confessors put the most intricate cases before him; he solved their doubts like a master.

THE WONDER-WORKER.

Somehow or other, the miraculous in the Lives of the Saints is not to everybody's liking. It gets on some people's nerves and makes them despair of imitating the one thing that is to be imitated in the saints, viz., their sanctity. Such people cannot be reminded too often that the saints were not saints because they worked miracles, but that they worked miracles because they were saints. The sanctity came first, the miracles second. Others there are—not necessarily outside the Household of the Faith—who look askance at all miraculous lives and dismiss them with a shrug. They shrink from what they cannot account for or themselves achieve, and seem to look on a miracle

as a sort of reflection on their own capabilities, and an undesirable reminder of their human limitations. One would almost think they were jealous of Almighty God.

Well, if we believe in a personal God at all, we must believe in miracles. "He who denies miracles, denies creation," says St. Augustine. Surely God is not to be the only lawgiver Who is not free to suspend His own laws. Were there no miracles in the lives of the saints, we should be on the look-out for them, especially since Our Lord said: *He that believeth in Me, the works that I shall do, he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do.*—John, xiv., 12. And, of course, once we admit miracles at all, their nature and their number need cause no trouble: the least of them calls for the exercise of omnipotence, and a thousand of them come as easily to God as one. Though we are not bound to believe in any miracle not recorded in Holy Scripture—since it rests on merely human testimony—still, to deny what hundreds of eyes have seen and to question evidence that has been sifted by the soberest and slowest tribunal on earth is nothing short of stupid. Therefore, to minimize the miraculous element in a saint's life is to rob him of God's testimony to his holiness and to rob ourselves into the bargain of a very great argument for trust in his power with heaven. Every miracle worked by a saint is, incidentally, a proof of the truth of all he stands for. It is comforting to our faith to read of a man who is endowed with surpassing supernatural gifts and who exercise tremendous supernatural powers, fed on the same Catholic doctrine as ourselves, believing to the last iota what we believe, having the same religious outlook as we have, warmed with the same Catholic loves as we are, and at home in all those emblems and devotions that have been dear to us from our childhood.

Now such a man was St. Gerard. His saintly director, Father Cafaro, spoke of his life as "a continuous miracle."

It was, indeed, a glittering chain of wonders. This simple, unlettered man seemed to bear a magician's wand in his hand. He was, indeed, God's magician and his wand was the omnipotence of his Master. It is not our purpose to record these wonders in detail. It is enough to say that every gift and power we meet with in other saints we meet in Gerard. His frequent ecstasies were often witnessed by crowds, and more than once he was borne a long distance in what is known as ecstatic flight through the air. As we have seen, he had knowledge of the deepest mysteries that amazed his audience. At times he read the future like an open book. He probed consciences with a certainty that terrified the guilty and brought comfort to the distressed. He knew of distant happenings and displayed the rare gift of bilocation. The elements obeyed him. The animal creation came and went at his beck. The laws of nature were often suspended at his bidding, when, for instance, in the sight of thousands, he trod stormy waters in the Bay of Naples and drew a sinking boat full of passengers to shore. Time and again food multiplied in his hands. On certain occasions he gave proof of the extraordinary power of making himself invisible. The bodily cures he effected are countless. He compelled the very demons to obey him and pressed them into the service of souls. Truly has St. Gerard been called a wonder-worker. However, he did a greater thing than work miracles: he suffered—for God.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS. . . .

It would be a mistake to think that all Gerard's days were days of unclouded sunshine; that he spent them dandled in the arms of Divine Providence, feasting in the sweets of His consolations, with creation as his toy to play with. Providence was, indeed, lavish of His care of him and lavish of His delights; while of Gerard we may almost write, though with far greater truth, what Francis Thompson

wrote of Shelley: "the universe was his box of toys." But sanctity is made of sterner stuff, and, though God does in truth favour His saints, He spoils none of them. The spoiling of His children the Father keeps for heaven: there He spoils them indeed.

And so Gerard suffered. He suffered from others. He crossed the path of the Evil One too often in his work for souls to hope to escape his attentions. More than once he had been openly confronted with his infernal foe and had always worsted him. Satan, however, is most successful when he works vicariously. The end he looks to; he is indifferent to the means. We have seen already what Gerard had to bear from others in his boyhood. We must record a painful incident of another kind that occurred in his life as a religious; it made him dearer to God than any ecstasy or miracle.

From his well-stocked armoury his enemy drew forth a favourite weapon and put it into an agent's hand. Gerard was slandered—foully and cruelly slandered. Long ago he had penned these words. "Among all the virtues that are dear to me, O my God, holy purity is my chosen one"; and now a wicked tongue accused him of being the worst of sinners. The evidence was overwhelming. He became an object of grave suspicion to his holy father, St. Alphonsus, whom he loved so well, and was summoned to meet him. A strange scene was that between two great saints—two earthly seraphs. Gerard listened to the horrible charge and said never a word. He remembered his vow always to do what was most perfect; he remembered his rule forbidding him to defend himself when reproved; he remembered One infinitely greater Who was silent under calumny. He bowed his innocent head beneath the bitter reproaches of St. Alphonsus and beneath the prohibition—far more bitter—to receive Holy Communion, and

gave his honour into the keeping of Him Who knows all. The Fathers who knew Gerard well urged him to clear himself—which, of course, he was fully justified in doing—but the answer always was: "There is a God in heaven; He will provide." To his sympathizers he would say: "It is enough to have Jesus Christ in my heart. . . . Never will I lose Him *there*." For many weary weeks the black cloud hung over him. When asked how he lived without Holy Communion, he made answer: "I recreate myself in the Immensity of God." At last the cloud lifted. The wretched creature who slandered him confessed to having done so at the instigation of Hell. Again was Gerard summoned to meet Alphonsus—this time to be taken to his heart. When asked why he did not defend himself, he pointed to the Rule. Already have artists made this scene their own.

Gerard suffered also from within. Here we will let the saint himself speak. Writing to a religious, he says:

"Pray earnestly for me who stand in such sore need of spiritual help and who, God knows, am so sad and bereft of consolation."

To another he writes:

"Do not, I beg of you, forget to commend me to the Lord. I am in the greatest need of prayers. Oh! God alone knows my continual trials."

To the same:

"I declare before God that this longing of mine (to receive his correspondent's letter) does not come from myself, but from the Lord Who sends me to others for help. . . . It is His Will that I should keep on my course through storm and wave."

To yet another religious:

"You cannot imagine the depth of my sorrows and how keenly I feel them. . . . Divine justice has nailed me to the cross in such wise that it seems to me that no one else can evermore be nailed to it. Ever praised be

the most holy Will of God. But what makes me tremble unceasingly and fills me with the greatest dread is the thought that I may not persevere to the end."

Ten months before his death, he writes:

"Have pity on me in my agony. . . . If I did not do violence to myself, I could not write at all; tears would keep me from doing so . . . So bitter are my trials that I seem to be in my death agony; and yet, when I feel as if I could breath forth my soul, I find I am still alive to endure further tribulation."

That I may not persevere to the end. When saints have such fears, what about sinners? Mysterious sufferings these, whose dark abysses we cannot sound, no more than we can measure the soaring heights with which they are commensurate.

HIS GREAT LOVES.

The supreme virtue of all the saints was, of course, their love of God with all the other loves which it implied. Among the saints, however, were some whose ardours flamed forth with such brightness and lifted them so near heaven that they seemed to have already begun to live there. Of this number was Gerard Majella. His life may be said to have been one unbroken act of love, growing in intensity to the end. But it was far from being nothing more than an unpractical and selfish rapture; it sought expression in the absolute indentification of its own will with the Will of the Beloved.

Gerard loved the Will of God; we doubt if there ever were a saint in whom this love showed more with all the strength of a sublime passion than it did him. What St. Alphonsus said of his holy director, Father Cafaro, could be said of Gerard: "His only passion was to fulfil the Will of God." "O Will of God!" he cries out, "Thou art worth as much as my God Himself; who can understand Thee except

God?" Whether that Will gave him sweets or bitters, it was all one. When urged to ask leave to receive Holy Communion again during the painful trials, he hesitated for a moment, but then said, striking the banisters as he spoke: "No, I must die in the wine-press of the Will of my God." During his last illness, he had written in large letters on his door these words: "*Here is done what God wills, as God wills, and for as long as He wills it*"; and when the Rector asked him if he were perfectly resigned in his great sufferings, he replied: "Yes Father. . . . I say to myself that my bed represents God's Will for me and that on this bed I am nailed to the Most Adorable Will of my God." No wonder that Gerard worked miracles and that God seemed to make Gerard's will His own.

He loved his Crucified God. In the prayer for his feast, in which the Church stresses what she considers to be the distinguishing feature of his career, we read: "O Almighty and Everlasting God, Who didst draw to Thyself the Blessed Gerard even from his tenderest years, making him conformable to the Image of Thy Crucified Son. . . ." From his early boyhood to his death, his heart's ambition was to resemble Jesus and Him Crucified. His Crucified Lord was his favourite subject of meditation, and to hear the Passion spoken of or to see its scenes in a picture was enough to throw him in ecstasy. But this devotion was no mere sentimental sympathy; he thirsted for sufferings more than sinners search for pleasures. "Christ Crucified," writes Tannoia, "was a book from which he constantly read; and the more he read from it the more he felt urged to torture his own body." And how he did torture that innocent body! Perhaps no saint has surpassed Gerard in corporal austerities; their details make terrible reading.

He loved his Eucharistic God. As we know, this love went back to the days of his childhood and grew with his growth. The Tabernacle was the centre of Gerard's life;

towards It not only his thoughts, but his untiring steps, were ever turned. Nor was the day enough for him; and when the world forget all about his "Dear Prisoner," as he called Him, he would steal before the altar and prolong his converse with his God far into the night. Sometimes it happened that strangers came to the house and an extra room was required. Gerard would then joyfully give up his cell and sleep in a little recess beneath the high altar. At the sight of the Sacred Host he would at times fall into an ecstasy, and, forgetting his surroundings, break into sighs and exclamations. Being once taken to task for this by the Superior, he seized the Father's hand and looked at him, as much as to say: "You see, I cannot help it." "It was a touching sight," writes a biographer, "to see how he struggled between his love for Jesus Christ and his spirit of obedience. . . . Once, when I was in the church unobserved by him, I noticed that when genuflecting before leaving, he struggled to rise, exclaiming: 'Let me go, Lord, I have something to do.'" He literally hungered for Holy Communion. One morning, during those awful weeks when he was debarred from the Holy Table, a priest asked him to serve Mass. "Do not ask me," he replied, "do not ask me, I beg of you; I might snatch the Lord from your hands."

Need we say it? Gerard loved God's Mother. One day, the doctor asked him if he loved Our Lady. "Oh, my dear doctor," he replied, his countenance aglow, "you torture me." What a question! Mary's name and Mary's image ravished him. On one occasion, when speaking of her love for men, he fell into an ecstasy that lasted for hours. He loved her Rosary and her Scapulars, and was ever busy distributing them. Mary returned love for love, making his last hour sweet with her presence.

A POPULAR AND PRACTICAL SAINT

The last hour came for Gerard on October 15, 1755. He had not completed his thirtieth year, nor the seventh of

his religious life, and little more than three years had passed since his profession. With the single exception of Therese of Lisieux, no saint of modern times has been so taken to the heart of the Catholic world as has Gerard. Though the saints, as far as the fundamentals of Christian holiness go, are all cast into a common mould, and, if we may so put it, are standardized, yet they do not lose their personality even as saints, nor have they all the same appeal to the body of the faithful. Now there are many things in the personality of St. Gerard Majella that account for his popularity; and, first of all, there is his rapturous love for God. We often hear that all the world loves a lover, and we know how the fortunes of youthful lovers are followed with interest in fact and fiction. It is even so with the fortunes of those supreme and youthful lovers among the saints: the Catholic world loves them and loves to read of them. It is so with the youthful lover of Lisieux, and it is so with the youthful lover of Muro.

Next, there is Gerard's trust in Providence. Viewed in the light of our own solicitude for the morrow, it disconcerts; but it charms also. Gerard walks through life with the heart of a child, his hand in his heavenly Father's, and his eyes looking upwards in every want with a confidence that seems more like vision than faith. His life is a fact that flashes the supernatural into the proud, averted eyes of an unbelieving world.

Then, with all his appalling austerities, Gerard is never austere. Austerities were, no doubt, the fruit of a spirit of penance for faults that he called crimes, though, indeed, they were comparatively small. We feel, however, that what drove him chiefly on was his longing to be like his Crucified Love in every detail of suffering; and so there is nothing forbidding about this dear young saint, and an atmosphere of brightness and child-like gaiety encompasses him on all occasions, reminding us of what man must have been before he fell.

Finally, there is Gerárd's overflowing love for others and sympathy with the stricken and distressed. Every page of his life is aglow with it. On himself alone he has no pity. Can we imagine any more accurate and beautiful picture of true Christian asceticism than this holy man, on a cold winter's day, his own flesh girt with penitential chains and tortured with a hair shirt, taking the numbed hands of little children into his own, and, with his eyes full of tears, gently chafing them to warmth?

We need scarcely add that the fact that Gerard has proved himself to be as much a wonder-worker since his death as he was in life counts for much. Of his miracles in favour of all classes of the faithful there is no end, and their multitude reminds us of what St. John says of the Master: *"There are also many other things which Jesus did; which if they were written everyone, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written"*—St. John xxi., 25. One thing Gerard so often did while he was on earth and has done so many times from heaven that we are justified in believing that the Lord has put the doing of it into his especial keeping: he tided many mothers, and still tides many, over anxious days, and countless little ones the world over owe their safety to his protection. There are countries where there is scarcely a mother who has not his picture and who does not confidently call upon his name.

We have called Gerard a practical saint. Some readers may question it. What, they may say, can it serve this workaday world to read of one who spent half his life in ecstasy and who seemed to have borrowed the omnipotence of his Maker? For answer we turn to his resolutions. They are thirty-eight in all; and six of these we have already seen in connection with his work. Here are more of them:

"In all trials, I will say always, 'Thy Will be done.'
I wish to carry out all that is commanded of me by

my Mother the Holy Catholic Church. Among all the virtues that are dear to Thee, O my God, holy Purity is my chosen one. When tempted to speak to the displeasure of God, I will say, 'My Jesus, I love Thee with my whole heart.' I will attack no one in conversation, nor will I make any reference to the faults of my neighbours, even in jest. I will be careful to excuse everyone, considering in my neighbour the Person of Jesus Christ, I will defend others, especially in their absence. If anyone should speak ill of another, I will warn him of his fault. I will do my utmost that others should be spared annoyance. If anyone blames or accuses me, I will strive to make all bitter feeling pass gently away."

Such are fifteen out of the thirty-eight resolutions of this mighty saint. Now what must strike us at once about them is their very elementary nature; and yet they were fifteen rungs of the ladder by which Gerard Majella scaled the peaks of perfection. They embody Gospel teaching that applies to all. Success in earthly business is often in great part the outcome of the sustained application of some fundamental principle of action which the common run of men look on as too commonplace to matter. May not this be true of the great business of sanctity? The truth is that if we do all we are bound to do, we shall do much that the saints did. Unfortunately, we have come to look upon many things the saints have achieved as things quite beyond our aspirations and our power, forgetting the while that the doing of them is the common duty of us all.

St. Gerard was, indeed, a wonder-worker. But, when we compare his efforts at sanctity with our own—when we remember how he, once his hand had been put to the plough, never looked back, while we—heroes of an hour—spend half our life making resolutions and half our life breaking them; when we compare his generosity in God's

service with our niggardliness, his holy daring in the greatest of all enterprises with our nibbling at the business; when we set his endurance of terrifying pains side by side with our fretful cowardice under the smallest trials—then we shall be driven to conclude that, when all is said and done, the most astounding wonder in his life—as it is in the life of any saint—is not his miracles, but his sanctity.
